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A ROMANCE OF OLD ROME.

BY PROFESSOR RODOLFO LANCIANI, LL.D., PH.D., F.A.S., ETC.

IN THE early morning of May 12 I was called to witness the opening of two marble coffins which had been discovered two days before under the foundations of the new Palazzo di Giustizia (Halls of Justice), in the neighborhood of Hadrian's mausoleum. Orders had been given for the removal of both sarcophagi to the City Museum of the Capitol, where the ceremony of cutting the brass clamps which fastened their lids and of examining and describing their contents could be quietly and carefully accomplished. This plan, however, was not found practicable, because both coffins happened to be filled with water, which had in by-gone centuries filtered within, drop by drop, through the interstices of the lids. Under such circumstances it was found impossible to remove the coffins to the Capitol, not only on account of the excessive increase in weight produced by the water, but also because the violent shaking of the liquid mass would have damaged and otherwise disordered the skeletons and the objects which, perchance, had been buried within. I hastened to the spot to see the matter properly attended to, and this is what I saw in the course of that memorable morning.

At a depth of twenty-five feet below the level of the city—that is to say, four or five feet only above the level of the Tiber, which runs close by—the two marble coffins were lying side by side, embedded in the soft damp clay. The one on the left-hand side was inscribed with the simple name

CREPEREIA TRYPHAENA,

and decorated with a bas-relief representing the scene of her death. The young maiden is lying on the funeral bed, with the head bending gently on the left shoulder. A veiled lady, sitting at the foot of the bed, seems to gaze intently at the dying girl. At the opposite end, near the pillow, is a male standing figure, absorbed in intense grief.

The other coffin, inscribed with the name

LIUCIO CREPEREIO EVHODO,

appeared to be perfectly plain and simple. Enough to say that it contained no objects of interest but the skeleton of a man about sixty years of age. The contents of the first coffin were far more precious, and almost unique of their kind.

No sooner had the seals been broken and the lid put aside than my assistants and myself, and, in fact, the whole crowd of workmen which had congregated around on the first announcement of the "find," were almost horrified at the sight before us. Gazing at the skeleton, through the veil of the pure water, we saw the skull covered, as it were, with dense long masses of brown hair floating in the liquid crystal. The comments made by the simple and excited crowd by which we were surrounded were almost as interesting as the discovery itself; the news concerning the prodigious hair spread like wild-fire among the *comères* of the district; and so the exhumation of *Creperia Tryphaena* was accomplished with unexpected solemnity, and its remembrance will last for many years to come in the popular traditions of the new quarter of the Halls of Justice (*prati di Castello*). The mystery of the hair is easily explained. Together with the spring water, germs or bulbs of an aquatic plant had entered the sarcophagus, settled on the convex surface of the skull, and developed into long glossy threads of a dark shade.

The skull was bending gently towards the left shoulder, as represented, by chance, in the *bas-relief*. On the same shoulder was lying an exquisite little doll carved in oak. On each side of the head there were gold ear-rings with drops of pearls. Mingled in a heap with the *vertebræ* of the neck and of the backbone there were a gold necklace, woven as a chain, with thirty-seven pendants of green jasper, and a large brooch with an *intaglio* in *amethyst*, of Greek workmanship, representing the fight of a griffin and a deer. Where the left hand had been lying, we found four rings of solid gold. One is an engagement-ring, with an engraving in red jasper representing two hands clasped together. The second has the name

PHILETVS

engraved on the stone. The third and the fourth rings are plain gold bands and need no special account.

Proceeding further with the exploration of the coffin, we discovered next to the right hipbone a box containing toilet articles. The box is made of thin sheets of hard wood, inlaid *alla Certosina*, as we Italians say, viz., with lines, squares, circles, triangles, and diamonds of bone, ivory, and wood of different kinds and colors. The box, however, had been completely disjointed by the long immersion, and I am afraid it will be very difficult to re-construct it. Among its contents we noticed a couple of fine combs, in excellent preservation, with the teeth larger on one side than on the other; a small disk of polished steel, very likely a mirror; and a small silver box for cosmetics. There were also a hairpin, six inches long, made of three pieces of amber, an oblong piece of soft leather, and a few fragments probably of a sponge—a substance so often found in the *cistae* at Palestrina, the ancient Praeneste.* The most impressive discovery was made after the removal of the water and the drying-up of the coffin. It was found then that the woman had been buried in a shroud of fine white linen, large pieces of which are still encrusted and cemented against the bottom of the coffin, and that she had been laid down with a wreath of myrtle fastened on the forehead with a silver clasp. The preservation of the leaves is really remarkable, and we have been able to put together a considerable portion of the wreath.

Who was this woman, whose sudden and unexpected appearance has created such a sensation among us? When did she live? At what age did she die? What was her condition in life? Did she have a happy existence, loving and loved? Was she handsome? Why was she buried with her doll? The careful examination of the tomb, as described above, enables us to answer satisfactorily all these questions—with certainty in some cases, with probability in others.

Crepereia Tryphaena must have lived at the beginning of the third century after Christ, under the empire of Septimius Severus or Caracalla, as shown by the form of the letters and by the style of the bas-relief engraved on the sarcophagus. She was not a noble woman by birth; her Greek surname, Tryphaena, proves that she belonged to a family of freedmen—that is to say, of former

* I have had the opportunity of examining the contents of twelve *cistae* discovered lately at Palestrina, and now in the possession of Signor Eliseo Borghi. They comprise sponges, combs of various kinds and shapes, hairpins, boxes still full of well-preserved powders and cosmetics, and other articles of the *mundus muliebris*.

servants of the noble family of the Crepereii. She was well proportioned, tall, and erect. Professor Alessandro Ceccarelli, the distinguished surgeon, who at our request has kindly examined and rearranged the skeleton, states her age as seventeen or eighteen. We know nothing about her features, but we can at least state that she had a strong and fine set of teeth.

There is no doubt that she was betrothed to the young man Philetus, whose name is engraved on the stone of the second ring, and that the two happy and loving youths had exchanged the oath of faith and mutual devotion for life, as represented by the symbol of the two hands clasped together.

The story of her sad death, and of the sudden grief which overtook her family on the very eve of a joyful wedding, is told plainly by the presence in her coffin of the doll and of the myrtle wreath.

Beginning from this last emblem, there is no doubt that it was meant to represent the *corona nuptialis*, the myrtle being notoriously the sacred plant of Venus. I believe, in fact, that the girl was buried in her full bridal costume, and then covered with the white shroud. Together with the pieces of this latter, other fragments of stuff have been found which have not yet been tested by microscopical or chemical analysis. It will be very interesting to ascertain whether or not they correspond to the quality and nature of the various articles connected with a wedding costume. This costume comprised a white tunic, called *tunica recta* or *regilla*, the specialty of which consisted in being "woven on a *tela*, the *stamen* of which was not drawn horizontally, but vertically, and woven, besides, upwards from below."* The *regilla* was fastened by a woollen girdle tied in a Hercules knot. It comprised also a bridal veil, called *flammeum*, of a bright yellow hue. The shoes, called *socci*, were probably of the same color. In the antique fresco known by the name of Nozze Aldobrandine, the bride wears yellow shoes: the same detail has been noticed very often in the wall paintings of Herculaneum and Pompeii. The dressing of the hair is described by Festus: there were three locks or curls on each side of the forehead—a characteristic arrangement shown by many portrait statues and busts.

Let us now turn our attention to the beautiful doll.

Human nature, notwithstanding the changes which the differences of time, of manners, and of education have brought about,

* See Becker, "Gallus," 165.

has always been the same since the beginning of the world. The same passions have never ceased to stir and to govern mankind, with the same alternations of good and evil, of joys and sorrows, of infantile simplicity and maturity of older age.* Then we no longer wonder on finding that the children of by-gone ages had toys and games absolutely identical with those of the present day. These playthings have mostly been found in tombs, pagan as well as Christian, and consist chiefly of dolls and marionettes, of *crepundia* (any kind of rattling instrument), money-boxes, little silver bells, used against the *jettatura* or evil-eye, ivory masks, Medusa's heads, little carts and boats, caricatures of men and beasts, and sometimes pigs with children on their backs. The origin of these last objects can be traced in the ancient Spartan custom of sacrificing young pigs to Diana on the occasion of the *Tithenidia*, the feast day of wet-nurses. There are also articulated serpents, with which children used to frighten each other. Such is evidently the serpent represented in a bas-relief now in the Villa Celimontana of Baron von Hoffmann, which shows the graceful figure of a boy concealed behind a large scenic mask, through the open mouth of which he flourishes a snake, with the intention of frightening a playmate who stands before the mask.

In the excavations of the Roman cemeteries on the Esquiline Hill I have found many curious objects in lead, which must be classed among toys. Such are, for instance, wheels for little carts, the spokes of which represent figures of charioteers; frames for diminutive mirrors; *passe-partouts* for portraits or medallions, and imitations of domestic utensils. The early explorers of the Catacombs speak of an infinite variety of playthings discovered in children's *loculi*, and especially of ivory blocks with letters in alto-relievo, used to learn the alphabet, as described by Quintilian and St. Jerome, who call them "instructive amusements for childhood." The manufacture and the use of toys are not peculiar to the Greco-Roman times and lands. In Egyptian tombs contemporary with the earliest dynasties many have been found, and distributed through the various museums of Europe, such as small mummies and mummy-cases, miniature boats manned by miniature sailors, and even little crocodiles, whose jaws can be opened or shut as you like. Among our own "finds"

* See the excellent memoir on ancient children's toys by Countess Ersilia Lovatelli Caetani, in *Nuova Antologia*, May, 1888, from which I have largely quoted.

we must mention little clay vases, with a ball inside, which, on being shaken, sound like a *sistrum*. They were used, together with the *sistra*, by nurses to amuse and quiet their young charges, accompanying the rattling with their own slow and monotonous singing, the *kata-ban-kalesis* of the Greek, the *neniae* of the Latins, the *ninna-nanna* of the Italians. Many of these objects have been discovered in Pompeian nurseries, whereas the brass *sistra* abound especially in the bed of the Tiber. Why they should be found in such quantities in the bed of the Tiber is one of the many mysteries connected with the history and nature of that remarkable river.

It was customary among the ancients to load the new-born child with gifts of every description. Mothers, friends, and even old family servants congregated around the cradle, admiring, caressing, and embracing the baby, while the venerable grandmother blessed and anointed him, wishing that roses and lilies might spring up along his path, and that palaces and rich domains might become his portion.

When a child was abandoned and deserted, the *crepundia* were either hung to his neck or were put in a basket by his side—a practice which signified that the poor lonely infant was put under the care of Bacchus, who had shared the same fate, and that, like this little god, it was hoped that he would be tended and cared for. In the Pio-Clementino section of the Vatican Museum there is a graceful statuette of a child, with many *crepundia* round his neck, by means of which the foundling could be identified in progress of time. In scene fourth, act fourth, of the “*Rudens*,” Plautus describes minutely the objects concealed in *Palestra’s* basket, which help the father to identify the long-lost daughter. Aristophanes and Terentius are very fond of constructing their plays on this plot of exposed infants, recognised in due time by their parents with the help of *gnorismata*.

The custom of modelling or moulding little figures in wax or clay was also a great diversion for Greek and Roman children. Lucianus refers to this practice both in “*Alkyon*” and in “*Dream*,” comparing most happily the innumerable changes which nature undergoes by the hands of God to the thousand forms which a bit of wax or clay receives in the hands of children. Artists of great value have condescended sometimes to model excessively small works, elegant and costly “*nothings*,”

to be compared to our French *bibelots*. Pliny speaks of *Kallistratos* having carved in ivory ants and other insects so tiny and minute that it was almost impossible to discover and appreciate their exact shape and proportions. *Myrmekides* is said to have cut first in ivory and then in marble a chariot drawn by four horses, which could be screened and concealed under the wings of a fly; and also a man-of-war, or *quadriremis*, not larger than the body of a bee.

The smallest of the many hundred marble figures which I have discovered is only nine-tenths of an inch high. It represents a lady attending to her toilet, with a mirror in the right hand. It is exhibited in the new Museum of the Orto Botanico, near the Coliseum.

To come back, however, to the special subject of dolls: the fact that they have been constantly found in Greece as well as in Italy, in pagan as well as in Christian tombs, shows how generally and constantly they must have been used. These dolls are of every kind and description, of wood, of clay, of ivory, of wax, and mostly articulated. Varro compares the fascination which dolls exert on children to the fascination of flowers, of gems, of money, of cakes. Plutarch, in writing affectionate words of comfort to his wife for the loss of their sweet Timossena, dwells upon the charming disposition of the child, and relates, among other traits, how she begged the nurse to give her milk not only to other children, but also to her doll.

The ancient custom of placing children's toys either inside or above tombs is too well known to need further illustration. To it refers the graceful story told by Vitruvius apropos of the Corinthian maiden on whose tomb the nurse had placed a round basket containing her former playthings. A plant of *acanthus* having surrounded the basket with its delicate tendrils and leaves, suggested to Kallimakos the first idea of the Corinthian capital.

The Museo Cristiano annexed to the Vatican Library is perhaps the richest in this modest but interesting class of antiques, especially in dolls and marionettes carved in bone, and articulated so that they could move and gesticulate by means of threads or wires.

All that I have said on the subject may seem not to pertain to the case of *Crepereia Tryphaena*, who must be supposed to have

given up her playthings many years before her death. A passage which we find in the second Satire of Persius (v. 70) enables us to explain the case very easily ; but, first, let me give a more detailed description of the little work of art.

The *pupa* is carved in oak, to which the combined action of age and water has given the hardness of metal. Although not different in size and shape from another doll, illustrated by Biscari in plate V. of the "*Antichi Ornamenti e Trastulli dei Cambini*," ours is modelled with a far more perfect imitation of the woman's form, and is considered by Visconti and Castellani the finest of its kind yet found in Roman excavations. The hands and feet are carved with the utmost skill. The arrangement of the hair is characteristic of the age of the Antonines, and differs but little from the style of Faustina the elder. The doll was probably dressed, and in the thumb of her right hand were inserted two gold key-rings, in imitation of those worn by housewives. The figure, the articulations of which at the hips, knees, shoulders, and elbows are still in good condition, is thirty centimetres high.

The verse of Persius above referred to—

Nempe hoc, quod Veneri donatae a virgine puppae—

signifies that dolls and playthings are not a specialty of children's tombs. It was customary for young ladies to offer their dolls to Venus or Diana on their wedding-day. But this was not the end reserved for Crepereia's doll. She was doomed to share the sad fate of her young mistress, and lie down by her corpse before the marriage ceremony could be accomplished.

RODOLFO LANCIANI.